

ORIGINAL

Algorithmic Explosion or Emotional Resonance? An Analysis of the Cross-Regional Dissemination Mechanism of the Song Méi chūxī and Emotional Identification Among People in the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan Region

¿Explosión algorítmica o resonancia emocional? Un análisis del mecanismo de difusión interregional del Song Méi chūxī y la identificación emocional entre personas de China continental y Taiwán

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: digital technology and social media boost cross-regional popular culture dissemination. The song Méi Chūxī spreads across Chinese Mainland and Taiwan Region via algorithms and emotional resonance, yet its dissemination mechanism remains understudied.

Objective: to explore the core drivers, differential paths of Méi Chūxī's cross-regional dissemination, and its interactive logic with audiences' emotional identification.

Method: grounded theory was adopted, combining in-depth interviews with 25 respondents (13 from Mainland, 12 from Taiwan) and online dissemination data analysis.

Results: dissemination is driven by algorithm fission and dissemination motivation synergy; emotional resonance mediates contact, cognition, and dissemination. Regional background moderates paths—Mainland relies on algorithm-driven rapid spread, Taiwan on social circle diffusion.

Conclusions: this study constructs a dissemination-identification interaction model, filling research gaps and providing references for cross-strait cultural communication.

Keywords: Grounded Theory; Algorithmic Content Recommendations; Cross-Regional Cultural Communication; Chinese Mainland; Taiwan Region.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la tecnología digital y las redes sociales impulsan la difusión interregional de la cultura popular. La canción Méi Chūxī se difunde en China continental y Taiwán mediante algoritmos y resonancia emocional; sin embargo, su mecanismo de difusión sigue siendo poco estudiado.

Objetivo: explorar los impulsores principales, las diferentes vías de difusión interregional de Méi Chūxī y su lógica interactiva con la identificación emocional del público.

Método: se adoptó la teoría fundamentada, combinando entrevistas en profundidad con 25 encuestados (13 de China continental, 12 de Taiwán) y análisis de datos de difusión en línea.

Resultados: la difusión está impulsada por la fisión de algoritmos y la sinergia de la motivación de difusión; la resonancia emocional media el contacto, la cognición y la difusión. El contexto regional modera las vías: China continental se basa en la rápida difusión impulsada por algoritmos, mientras que Taiwán se basa en la difusión en círculos sociales.

Conclusiones: este estudio construye un modelo de interacción difusión-identificación, llenando vacíos de

investigación y proporcionando referencias para la comunicación cultural entre ambos lados del estrecho.

Palabras clave: Teoría Fundamentada; Recomendaciones de Contenido Algorítmico; Comunicación Cultural Interregional; China Continental; Región de Taiwán.

INTRODUCTION

The iteration of digital technology and the widespread application of social media platforms have propelled the cross-regional dissemination of popular culture into an era of instant interaction.⁽¹⁾ Short videos and social sharing platforms enable popular songs to transcend geographical boundaries and spread rapidly; while increasingly frequent cross-strait cultural exchanges⁽²⁾ have made popular music an important vehicle for emotional expression.⁽³⁾ It has become an important cultural link connecting people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. Against this backdrop, the cross-regional dissemination of the song (*Méi chūxī*) has attracted widespread attention: it achieved viral spread through algorithmic recommendations and user sharing, and its lyrics, containing life insights and emotional appeals, sparked heated discussions among listeners on both sides of the strait. This phenomenon raises two core questions: What drives the cross-strait dissemination of song *Méi chūxī*? Is there an intrinsic connection between the spread of online popular culture in Chinese Mainland and Taiwan Region and the emotional identification of people in both regions?

Existing research on the cross-regional dissemination of online popular culture mainly revolves around two distinct paths. One approach emphasizes a technology-driven logic, viewing algorithms and social network fragmentation as core drivers of dissemination, and arguing that recommendation mechanisms and topic marketing are key to cross-regional diffusion.^(4,5) The other approach focuses on cultural and emotional dimensions, considering emotional resonance as crucial for breaking down geographical barriers, and viewing the dissemination of cultural products such as songs and films as the cross-regional flow of emotional symbols,⁽⁶⁾ for example, *Black Myth: Wukong*.⁽⁷⁾ However, both research paths typically treat algorithm recommendation and emotional resonance as independent dimensions, lacking comparative analysis and exploration of their dynamic relationship within a unified framework. Furthermore, research on the dissemination of popular culture across the Taiwan Strait largely focuses on traditional cultural symbols or major cultural events, paying insufficient attention to popular songs in daily life. In particular, there is a lack of in-depth analysis of the driving forces of dissemination and the interactive mechanisms of emotional identification among audiences on both sides of the Strait, making it difficult to explain the differentiated effects and internal logic of the cross-regional dissemination of such works.

The cross-regional dissemination of song (*Méi chūxī*) was not driven by a single force; its dissemination path and differentiated effects are essentially the result of the interaction between the logic of algorithm technology and the logic of emotional identification. To fill the aforementioned research gaps, this study employs grounded theory to analyze primary data, including in-depth interviews with audiences on both sides of the Taiwan Strait and online dissemination data of the song. This study focuses on two core dimensions: “algorithm recommendation” and “emotional resonance,” exploring the core driving forces and differentiated paths of *Méi chūxī*’s cross-regional dissemination, systematically revealing the interactive logic between dissemination dynamics and the emotional identification of audiences on both sides of the Strait, and constructing a cross-regional dissemination mechanism model.

This study fills the gap in existing research on the dynamic comparison and mechanism analysis of algorithm and emotional dimensions in cross-regional cultural dissemination, providing theoretical and practical references for understanding the adaptability of cross-strait popular culture dissemination and promoting cross-regional emotional resonance, while also taking into account the understanding of researchers outside the field of cross-strait cultural dissemination.

METHOD

Grounded Theory

Cultural transmission is a complex human activity.⁽⁸⁾ This study focuses on the cross-regional transmission mechanism of the song *Méi chūxī* and its interaction with the emotional identification of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, involving algorithms, communication behavior, emotional resonance, and regional identity. Grounded theory’s research logic aligns with the objectives of this study. It overcomes the limitations of isolated analyses of “algorithm fission” and “emotional resonance,” and delves into the moderating role of emotional identification on transmission effects within the cross-strait cultural context. Through coding, it reveals the interaction logic of each core element, ultimately constructing an integrated model of the transmission mechanism.

This study will strictly follow the three-level coding process of grounded theory: open coding conceptualizes

the raw data; axial coding uncovers the connections between concepts and forms core categories; and selective coding focuses on these core categories to construct a theoretical framework, providing solid methodological support for analyzing the interaction logic between cross-regional transmission mechanisms and emotional identification.

Data collection

This study uses in-depth interviews as the core data collection method, supplemented by online dissemination data for verification. In-depth interviews can directly capture the differences in access paths, dissemination motivations, emotional perceptions, and identifications of people on Chinese Mainland and Taiwan Region regarding the songs. Through interactive questioning, the intrinsic connection between “algorithm recommendation” and “emotional resonance” is dissected layer by layer. This ability to explore deep psychological and behavioral logic is difficult for quantitative research methods to replace (Lim, 2025). Online dissemination data (such as platform topic popularity, sharing paths, and comment content) is used to corroborate the representativeness of the interview conclusions and ensure the objectivity of the research results.

Sample selection and scenario setting

The sample sources cover Chinese Mainland and Taiwan Region, and the sampling logic strictly adheres to the principles of regional balance and diverse characteristics to ensure both sample representativeness and reproducibility of the selection process. There are three core reasons for choosing both sides of the Taiwan Strait as the research setting: First, the shared cultural roots and different social backgrounds of both sides provide a unique perspective for analyzing cross-regional communication dynamics and differences in emotional identification; second, the song *Méi chūxī* has generated widespread popularity on social media platforms on both sides, covering different age and professional groups, thus comprehensively capturing diverse communication and identification phenomena; third, the differences in algorithmic logic and user behavior between mainstream social media platforms on both sides (Douyin and Weibo in Chinese Mainland, and Facebook and Line in Taiwan Region) allow for precise comparison of the regional characteristics of algorithm virality.

In terms of scenario selection, considering the entire process of song dissemination, two core scenarios were specifically chosen: First, online social media platforms (covering mainstream media on both sides of the Taiwan Strait), focusing on the entire online chain of “song exposure - sharing and dissemination - topic interaction”; second, offline daily scenarios (family discussions, friend gatherings, and circle exchanges), capturing the secondary dissemination and emotional resonance of the song offline. These two scenarios cover the complete dissemination path of online virality and offline resonance, ensuring that the data comprehensively reflects the dynamic relationship between dissemination and recognition.

The sample selection process proceeded in two steps: The first step was recruitment and pre-screening, disseminating recruitment information through online communities on both sides of the Taiwan Strait and offline community channels, clearly defining the research theme (song *Méi chūxī*) dissemination experience and emotional feelings) and privacy protection measures (data anonymization, used only for academic research); pre-screening was conducted through online questionnaires, strictly defining the target group (those who have listened to the song (*Méi chūxī*), are ≥ 18 years old, and reside in Chinese Mainland or Taiwan Region), excluding non-target groups (those who have never been exposed to the song). The second step is to stratify and adapt the samples. This involves stratified sampling based on four dimensions: region (Chinese Mainland/Taiwan Region), age group, frequency of social media use (high frequency/medium frequency/low frequency), and song exposure (listened to/shared/participated in topic discussions). This ensures that the samples cover groups with different communication experiences and backgrounds, providing a multi-faceted perspective for exploring the interactive logic of communication dynamics and emotional identification (see table 1).

Table 1. Demographic statistics			
Demographic Variables	Categories	Sample Size	Percentage
Gender	Male	15	60 %
	Female	10	40 %
Age	18-30 years old	12	48 %
	31-45 years old	7	28 %
	46 years old and above	6	24 %
Region	Mainland China	13	52 %
	Taiwan Region of China	12	48 %

Education Level	High school and below	8	32 %
	Bachelor's degree	15	60 %
	Master's degree and above	2	8 %
Social Media Usage Frequency	High frequency (≥ 3 hours per day)	11	44 %
	Medium frequency (1-3 hours per day)	11	44 %
	Low frequency (< 1 hour per day)	3	12 %
Exposure to the Song	Never heard	5	20 %
	Heard only	10	40 %
	Heard and shared	8	32 %
	Heard, shared, and participated in topic discussions	2	8 %

Interview Implementation and Data Processing

This interview was conducted from October 20th to November 10th, 2025, using a combination of online video (Zoom, Tencent Meeting) and in-person interviews. After its release on Douyin on October 5th, 2025, the song quickly went viral on social media platforms in mainland China and Taiwan, reaching its peak in cross-regional dissemination and derivative works in mid-to-late October. Conducting the survey during this period ensured that respondents could fully experience and recall the song's spread and interactive scenarios.

The interview outline closely follows the core logic of “dissemination path—emotional resonance—regional identity,” and takes into account the characteristics of the “unheard song” group in the sample, optimizing it into four parts: The first part is the song exposure stage (those who have heard the song need to explain whether they came across it through algorithm recommendation, friend sharing, or topic attraction, as well as their platform usage habits; those who have not heard the song need to explain why they haven't heard it, such as lack of platform recommendation or mismatch of interests); the second part is the dissemination behavior stage (those who have heard the song and shared it need to explain their sharing motivation, whether it's following a hot topic or emotional resonance, and the logic behind their choice of dissemination channels); the third part is the emotional identification stage (those who have heard the song need to interpret the emotions conveyed by the lyrics and melody, whether these emotions resonate with their own experiences, and the differences in perception of the song's emotional expression between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait); the fourth part is supplementary discussion (views on the viral dissemination model of “adaptation of political figures' quotes + catchy melody,” and understanding of the interaction of folk culture between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait). Specifically, participants were first shown popular clips of the song (including the original version on TikTok, a Taiwanese Hokkien cover, and a suona/piano arrangement) and screenshots of discussion forums on Taiwanese and mainland Chinese social media platforms (TikTok and Weibo in mainland China, and Facebook and YouTube in Taiwan) to evoke their experiences of exposure and interaction. Then, case studies (such as “Do you think there are differences in how netizens on both sides of the Taiwan Strait interpret the same lyric?”) were used to stimulate deeper reflection. Finally, an open-ended Q&A session was held, encouraging participants to share their views on the song's popularity, the strength of its emotional resonance, and the reasons behind it. Each interview lasted an average of 45 minutes and was recorded in its entirety, with two researchers simultaneously transcribing key information to reduce social expectation bias.⁽⁹⁾

This study interviewed a total of 25 participants, 13 from Chinese Mainland and 12 from Taiwan Region. Simultaneously, three cross-regional exchange groups (each consisting of 2-3 members from mainland China and Taiwan) were selected for focus group interviews. The discussion topics included “differences in song dissemination across the Taiwan Strait,” “regional adaptability of emotional expression,” and “differences in the dissemination priority of trending topics and emotional resonance.” All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Combining this with 200 song-related comments, 50 shared posts, and 30 derivative works from platforms across the Taiwan Strait, approximately 230 000 words of text data were collected, providing ample and accurate material support for subsequent coding analysis.

The data analysis referenced Lim⁽¹⁰⁾'s coding guidelines and strictly followed the three-level coding process of grounded theory. First, all text materials were coded line by line in an open-ended manner to extract initial concepts such as algorithm recommendation, emotional resonance, regional cognition, and secondary creation-driven. Then, the relevant concepts were classified through axis coding to form core categories such as algorithm splitting path, emotional resonance dimension, emotional identification difference, and cross-regional dissemination adaptability. Finally, a theoretical framework of dissemination dynamics, emotional identification and cross-regional dissemination effect was constructed through selective coding,^(11,12) which reveals the core mechanism of the song *Méi chūxī*'s cross-regional dissemination.

Ethical Consideration

This study is a qualitative research on the cross-regional dissemination mechanism of the song *Méi Chūxī* and emotional identification among people in the Chinese Mainland and Taiwan Region, based on grounded theory, with semi-structured interviews as the core research method. The research focuses on respondents' cognition of the song's dissemination process, emotional experience brought by the song, and perception of cross-strait cultural connections, and does not involve the collection of sensitive personal information or research activities that may pose physical or mental risks to respondents.

Since the research institution does not have a dedicated Institutional Review Board (IRB) for humanities and social sciences research, and this study complies with the relevant requirements of Measures for the Ethical Review of National Social Science Fund Projects (Trial) and Ethical Review Norms for Humanities and Social Sciences Research (Trial), the requirement for formal ethical approval was waived after internal ethical review by the research team.

RESULTS

Based on the research methods and analytical steps of grounded theory,⁽¹³⁾ this study uses open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to progressively code in-depth interview data and online dissemination texts.

Open Coding

Open coding is the first step in grounded theory, aiming to extract the core information from raw data. This study classifies interview texts, transforming algorithmic recommendation phenomena and sentiment expressions into ordered analytical units. The specific operation follows a three-tiered logic: First, each sentence in the interview texts of 25 respondents and online materials is initially labeled (denoted as "a"); second, semantically similar initial sentence labels are categorized to form initial concepts (denoted as "aa"); finally, the core connotations of the initial concepts are integrated to form initial categories (denoted as "A").

After coding, 23 initial concepts were extracted from the data. After further merging and elimination, 12 initial categories were finally obtained.

Table 2. Open Coding Example (Partial)

Initial Categories (A)			Initial Concepts (aa)		Original Statements (a)
A1 Algorithm Fission Paths			aa1	Algorithmic Recommendation Exposure	a1. "I came across it while scrolling through Douyin. I saw many different bloggers using this song as BGM in a row, so I clicked to listen" (Mainland China, 28 years old, high-frequency social media user)
			aa2	Social Circle Diffusion	a2. "A friend shared the Taiwan cover version on Facebook, saying 'This song is super popular lately,' so I clicked to watch it and later reposted it to my homepage" (Taiwan Region of China, 35 years old, heard and shared)
A2 Emotional Resonance Triggers			aa3	Lyric Resonance	a3. Its lyrics really resonated with me. I felt the same way when I was unemployed last year. I cried while listening to it. (China Mainland, 42 years old, sharing after listening)
			aa4	Melody Perception	a4. "The melody is catchy, a bit like the Minnan dialect songs I listened to as a kid. Even though the lyrics are straightforward, singing along a few times feels really relieving" (Taiwan Region of China, 25 years old, heard only)
A3 Regional Dissemination Differences			aa5	Platform Preference Differentiation	a5. "We mainly discuss it on Douyin and Weibo here. I asked my Taiwanese friends, and they said they mostly come across it on YouTube and Line" (Mainland China, 30 years old, participated in topic discussions)
			aa6	Dissemination Speed Difference	a6. "It seems to have become popular faster in Mainland China. It took a week for people here to start sharing it. Maybe the platform algorithms are different" (Taiwan Region of China, 40 years old, heard only)
A4 Emotional Identification Differences			aa7	Life Context Interpretation Differences	a7. "Friends in Mainland China think the lyrics are about 'the spirit of striving,' but we feel it's more about 'the helplessness of ordinary people' . Maybe the sources of life pressure are different" (Taiwan Region of China, 38 years old, cross-regional group member)
			aa8	Cultural Symbol Perception Differences	a8. "The down-to-earth elements feel familiar to us. It means a description of fate." (Mainland China, 22 years old, participating in the discussion)

A5 Non-Exposure Reasons	aa9 Lack of Algorithmic Recommendation	a9. “I don’t scroll through short videos much, and none of my friends posted about it on social media. I’ve never heard this song at all” (Taiwan Region of China, 50 years old, never heard)
	aa10 Insufficient Interest Matching	a10. “I like classical music. Even if this pop song is recommended to me, I won’t click on it. It feels irrelevant to me” (Mainland China, 48 years old, never heard)
A6 Dissemination Motivation Differences	aa11 Algorithm Following Motivation	a11. “I clicked on it because it was trending. When I posted it on my WeChat Moments, I specifically added a hashtag, hoping to ride the wave of popularity.” (Mainland China, 26 years old, sharing after hearing about it)
	aa12 Emotional Expression Motivation	a12. “Listening to the lyrics made me think of my dad. He always says ‘It’s okay if you’re not outstanding.’ So I forwarded it to my family, not caring about the popularity at all” (Taiwan Region of China, 32 years old, heard and shared)

Axis Encoding

Axial coding is a crucial step in grounded theory research. This study focuses on the core question of how the cross-regional dissemination mechanism of the song (Méi chūxī) and the interaction of emotional identification between people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are formed. It integrates 12 initial categories obtained from open coding to explore the causal relationships and pathways of action among the four main categories. This coding process clarifies the roles of each category in the dissemination-identification interaction, and lays the foundation for subsequent construction of an integrated theoretical model and analysis of the logic of cross-regional dissemination (see table 3).

Table 3. Main categories formed by axial coding

Main Categories	Corresponding Initial Categories	Category Connotations
Dissemination Dynamics Trigger	A1 Algorithm Fission Paths, A6 Dissemination Motivation Differences, A11 Secondary Creation-driven (Open coding did not list all examples; the complete category includes these)	Focuses on the core factors for the initiation and diffusion of the song Méi chūxī’s cross-regional dissemination. It covers algorithm-driven paths such as algorithmic recommendation and social circle diffusion, differentiated motivations of algorithm following and emotional expression, as well as the amplifying effect of secondary creation on dissemination, serving as the core initiator of cross-regional dissemination.
Emotional Resonance Mediation	A2 Emotional Resonance Triggers, A12 Perceived Value Alignment (Open coding did not list all examples; the complete category includes these)	Reflects the connecting bridge between song dissemination and emotional identification. It includes direct resonance triggered by lyric content and melody appeal, as well as the perceived alignment between the life attitude conveyed by the song and the audience’s values, acting as the key mediator that transforms passive exposure into active dissemination and in-depth identification.
Regional Context Moderation	A3 Regional Dissemination Differences, A4 Emotional Identification Differences	Focuses on the moderating role of the unique contexts on both sides of the Taiwan Strait in dissemination and identification. It covers differences in dissemination speed and paths caused by preferences for social platforms and algorithmic logics on both sides, as well as differentiated emotional interpretations arising from differences in life contexts and cultural symbol cognition, serving as the core moderating variable for disparities in cross-regional dissemination effects and identification intensity.
Dissemination Outcome Manifestation	A5 Non-Exposure Reasons, A7 Perceived Dissemination Effects, A8 Emotional Identification Stratification, A9 Secondary Dissemination Intention (Open coding did not list all examples; the complete category includes these)	Reflects the final form of cross-regional dissemination. It includes non-exposure status caused by lack of algorithmic recommendations and mismatched interests, the audience’s perception of the song’s dissemination popularity and influence, hierarchical differences in emotional identification from superficial favor to in-depth empathy, and secondary dissemination intention derived from identification, acting as the direct external manifestation of the dissemination-identification interaction.

Selective coding

Selective coding, within grounded theory, unravels the logical connections between core categories,

principal categories, and initial categories, ultimately forming a complete theoretical framework capable of explaining how the cross-regional dissemination of the song (Méi chūxī) interacts with the emotional identification of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.⁽¹⁴⁾

This study, through repeated comparisons and data retrospection of four principal categories (dissemination dynamics triggering, emotional resonance mediation, regional context adjustment, and dissemination outcome presentation) and their subordinate 23 initial concepts and 12 initial categories, finds that all principal categories revolve around the core question of how the song (Méi chūxī) achieves cross-regional dissemination and what kind of interactive relationship it forms with the emotional identification of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. The absence of any principal category cannot fully cover the entire chain of dissemination-identification. Dissemination dynamics triggering is the starting engine for cross-regional diffusion; emotional resonance mediation is the core bridge for deepening the dissemination effect; regional context adjustment is the key variable causing differences in dissemination and identification; and the dissemination outcome presentation is the direct feedback of the interactive relationship. Therefore, this study defines the core category as the dynamic interaction mechanism between the cross-regional dissemination of the song (Méi chūxī) and the emotional identification of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, and based on this, it outlines the paradigmatic relationships and core storylines among the main categories.

Table 4. Core categories formed by selective coding

Paradigmatic Relationship Structure	Relationship Connotation	Paradigmatic Relationship Structure
Dissemination Dynamics Trigger and Emotional Resonance Mediation	Initial exposure driven by algorithmic recommendation and social sharing requires emotional transformation through lyric resonance, melody appeal, and perceived value alignment. Audiences who only encounter the song through algorithm without emotional resonance mostly remain at the heard only level, while those who experience emotional resonance will actively strengthen their identification with the song and promote secondary dissemination.	Dissemination Trigger and Emotional Resonance Mediation
Dissemination Dynamics Trigger and Dissemination Outcome Manifestation	Dissemination triggered solely by algorithm fission without the mediation of emotional resonance tends to result in superficial dissemination outcomes such as heard only without sharing. In contrast, dissemination driven by emotional expression motivation, even with limited initial algorithm, may lead to in-depth participation outcomes such as secondary creation and topic discussions due to strong identification.	Dissemination Trigger and Dynamics Dissemination Outcome Manifestation
Emotional Resonance Mediation and Dissemination Outcome Manifestation	The intensity of emotional resonance directly determines the dissemination outcome: shallow resonance such as finding the melody catchy mostly corresponds to the heard only state; moderate resonance such as being touched by certain lyrics corresponds to the heard and shared state; deep resonance such as alignment of values corresponds to the states of participating in topic discussions and secondary creation.	Emotional Resonance Mediation and Dissemination Outcome Manifestation
Regional Context Moderation and Dissemination Dynamics Trigger	Algorithmic recommendation on Douyin and Weibo in Mainland China is more efficient, driving the rapid fission of the song. Social circle dissemination on Facebook and YouTube in Taiwan Region is prominent, resulting in slightly slower dissemination speed. Moreover, secondary creation there focuses more on local language adaptation such as Minnan dialect covers, forming differentiated dissemination paths.	Regional Context Moderation and Dissemination Dynamics Trigger
Regional Context Moderation and Emotional Resonance Mediation	Differences in life contexts between the two sides affect emotional interpretation: audiences in Mainland China are more likely to perceive the spirit of striving from Keep going even if you have to struggle, while audiences in Taiwan Region focus more on the helplessness and healing of ordinary people. Differences in cultural symbol cognition such as down-to-earth elements affect the intensity of resonance, which requires adaptation through circle interpretation.	Regional Context Moderation and Emotional Resonance Mediation
Non-Exposure Reasons and Dissemination Outcome Manifestation	Lack of algorithmic recommendation such as among low-frequency social media users and insufficient interest matching such as preference for traditional music directly lead to the outcome of never heard. This state is not affected by emotional resonance or regional context and constitutes a natural blind spot in dissemination coverage.	Non-Exposure Reasons and Dissemination Outcome Manifestation

Dissemination Outcome and Dissemination Dynamics Trigger	Audiences deeply involved in dissemination such as secondary creators and topic leaders become new dissemination nodes. By sharing secondary creation works and initiating relevant topics, they reversely enhance the algorithm fission effect, promoting the further spread of the song across the two sides and forming a positive cycle of outcome feedback and motivation enhancement.	Dissemination Outcome and Dissemination Dynamics Trigger
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Cross-regional dissemination is not solely influenced by algorithms or emotions, but rather by a combination of both. Algorithms brought the song to the public eye, geographical differences led to variations in dissemination and understanding, and emotional resonance prompted sharing. Ultimately, different people generated different reactions. Those who shared the song more deeply brought in even more online traffic, creating a virtuous cycle. This also illustrates that different emotional resonances among people directly influenced the song's spread across mainland China and Taiwan (for example, it quickly became popular in Chinese Mainland, while Taiwan Region focused more on covers and healing interpretations).

Saturation test

Nvivo 12 was used for theoretical saturation test on the remaining 6 interview cases 3 from Mainland China and 3 from Taiwan Region covering different ages social media usage frequencies and song exposure levels. Following grounded theory steps the remaining samples were re-coded. No new main categories initial concepts or category relationships emerged. The existing theoretical framework fully explains the research phenomenon so the dynamic interaction model has achieved theoretical saturation.

DISCUSSION

Propagation Dynamics Trigger: The Starting Engine for Cross-Regional Propagation

The main category consists of algorithm fission path, differences in dissemination motivations, and secondary creation. Algorithm fission paths include algorithm recommendation contact ⁽¹⁵⁾ and social circle diffusion.⁽¹⁶⁾ Differences in dissemination motivations are reflected in algorithm following motivation ⁽¹⁷⁾ and emotional expression motivation.⁽¹⁸⁾ Its core is to provide initial exposure and diffusion power for the cross-regional dissemination of songs, which is the core manifestation of “algorithm recommendation”.

In the algorithm viral marketing path, algorithmic recommendations are the primary channel through which mainland Chinese audiences encounter songs.

“I was recommended this song while scrolling through Douyin (TikTok), and after seeing three different bloggers using it as background music, I clicked to listen” (a1, mainland China, 28 years old, frequent social media user).

This reflects the decisive role of algorithmic distribution efficiency on platforms like Douyin and Weibo in the speed of dissemination. It achieves rapid viral spread through precise push notifications based on user behavior data, following the path of “core content → algorithmic amplification → broad reach.” In contrast, Taiwan relies more on social circle diffusion.

“A friend shared a Taiwanese cover version on Facebook, saying ‘This song is really popular lately,’ so I clicked to watch it” (a2, Taiwan, 35 years old, heard and shared it).

This reflects the “circle-based trust dissemination” characteristic of platforms like Line and YouTube, where initial contact requires recommendations from acquaintances.

The differentiation of dissemination motivations directly affects the depth of dissemination: Algorithm-following motivation drives shallow dissemination.

“I clicked on it as soon as I saw it trending at number one, and deliberately added the hashtag when posting it on WeChat Moments, hoping to ride the wave” (a11, mainland China, 26 years old, heard and shared).

This type of dissemination only pursues exposure, lacks emotional attachment, and easily fades with the topic's popularity. Emotional expression motivation drives “deep dissemination”.

“Hearing the lyrics reminded me of my dad; he always says ‘It’s okay to be unsuccessful,’ so I forwarded it to my family, regardless of the trend” (a12, Taiwan, 32 years old, heard and shared).

This type of dissemination centers on emotional expression, has stronger dissemination sustainability, and

is more likely to trigger secondary interactions.

Secondary creations have become an amplifier of dissemination power. Secondary works such as Taiwanese Hokkien covers and mainland Chinese adaptations not only continue the core emotions of the songs but also adapt to the local cultural context.

“When I saw the Hokkien cover version, I felt more familiar with it, so I for-warded it to my family group” (Taiwan, 40 years old, only heard it).

These works further expand their cross-regional coverage through localized adaptation and circle-based dissemination, forming a fission cycle of original work, secondary creation and re-dissemination.

Emotional resonance as a mediator: the core bridge from initial contact to identity recognition.

This main category consists of emotional resonance triggers and perceived value alignment. Emotional resonance triggers include resonance with lyrical content and perception of the infectious power of melody.^(19,20) It is the key to connecting traffic acquisition with deep identification, and the core manifestation of emotional resonance. Only through emotional resonance can passively scrolling through content be transformed into active identification and dissemination.

The core trigger is the resonance of the lyrics, which also presents characteristics of shared emotions and regional interpretations.

The shared emotions revolve around the struggles and self-acceptance of ordinary people.

“The phrase ‘crawling and scrambling’ really resonated with me; that’s exactly how I felt when I was unemployed last year.” (a3, Mainland China, 42 years old, heard and shared).

This catharsis of life’s pressures and acceptance of ordinary life transcends the geographical barriers between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, forming a foundation for cross-group resonance. However, regional differences in interpretation reflect the adaptability of emotional resonance: Mainland audiences are more likely to associate it with the narrative of struggle, while Taiwanese audiences focus more on the narrative of healing.

“Mainland friends feel the lyrics convey a ‘sense of struggle,’ while we feel it more like ‘the helplessness of ordinary people’.” (a7, Taiwan, 38 years old, member of the cross-regional group).

This difference stems from the different social contexts on both sides of the Strait, but it hasn’t weakened the intensity of the resonance; on the contrary, it has enriched the dimensions of emotional expression.

The infectiousness of the melody provides emotional value for this resonance.

“The melody is very catchy, a bit like the Hokkien songs I listened to as a child. Although the lyrics are straightforward, singing along for a couple of lines is very stress-relieving.” (a4, Taiwan, 25 years old, only heard).

The catchy melody lowers the barrier to emotional understanding; even without fully empathizing with the lyrics, the melody can create a positive impression, laying the groundwork for deeper resonance later. A shared sense of value elevates this resonance, with some respondents associating the lyrics with values such as “anti-competitiveness” and “acceptance of ordinariness.”

“Everyone’s caught up in this competitive environment now, and this song says ‘It’s okay to be unsuccessful,’ which really resonates with me” (Mainland China, 30 years old, participating in the discussion).

This alignment of values elevates the song from “popular music” to an emotional symbol, strengthening the stability of identification.

Regional Context Adjustment: A Difference Filter for Cross-Regional Communication

This main category consists of regional dissemination differences and emotional identification differentiation. Regional dissemination differences include platform preference differentiation and dissemination speed differences.⁽²¹⁾ Emotional identification differentiation covers differences in the interpretation of life context and differences in the perception of cultural symbols.^(22,23) At its core is the unique social culture and dissemination ecology of mainland China and Taiwan, which will have a selective impact on dissemination paths and emotional

interpretations, and is a key variable causing cross-regional dissemination differences.

In terms of dissemination path adjustment, the algorithm logic and user habits of social platforms on both sides of the Taiwan Strait differ significantly: Mainland platforms as Douyin⁽²⁴⁾ and Weibo⁽²⁵⁾ prioritize maximizing traffic, with algorithm recommendation taking precedence over circle-based dissemination, driving the rapid and widespread viral spread of songs; while commonly used platforms in Taiwan (Instagram⁽²⁶⁾, Facebook⁽²⁷⁾, YouTube⁽²⁸⁾) focus more on circle stickiness, with recommendation mechanisms tilted towards sharing among acquaintances and interest circles, resulting in slower but longer-lasting dissemination, and secondary creations are more likely to form circle-based hotspots.

“We mainly discuss it on Douyin and Weibo. I asked my Taiwanese friends, and they said they see it more often on YouTube and Line” (a5, Mainland, 30 years old, participating in the topic discussion).

This platform preference differentiation directly leads to differences in dissemination pace and coverage groups.

In terms of emotional interpretation adjustment, the differences in the life context and cultural symbol cognition on both sides of the Taiwan Strait shape different resonance focuses. Mainland audiences, due to the context of “struggle culture,” are more likely to perceive the power of resilience in adversity from lyrics; Taiwanese audiences, due to the popularity of healing culture, tend to focus more on accepting the comfort of the ordinary. Differences in the perception of cultural symbols also affect resonance and adaptation.

“We feel familiar with the ‘rustic’ elements in music” (a8, Mainland China, 22 years old, participating in the discussion).

These cultural symbols need to be adapted through inter-circle interpretations (such as netizens’ annotations and bloggers’ interpretations) to achieve cross-regional transmission of emotional resonance.

Direct feedback from communication and identity-building interactions

The main category consists of reasons for not being contacted, the stratification of identification intensity, and the willingness to spread the message. Reasons for not being contacted include the lack of algorithmic recommendations⁽²⁹⁾ and insufficient interest matching. The stratification of identification intensity covers shallow liking, moderate resonance, and deep empathy. It is the final manifestation of the interaction of the four main categories and directly reflects the coverage and depth of cross-regional communication.

The lack of exposure among this group is primarily due to insufficient reach and subjective aversion to the message.

“I don’t watch short videos much, and none of my friends post about it on social media. I’ve never even heard of this song.” (a9, Taiwan, 50 years old, never heard of it).

This group, due to their low frequency of social media use, is not covered by algorithms and represents a natural blind spot for dissemination.

“I like classical music. Even if you recommend this kind of pop song to me, I won’t click on it.” (a10, Mainland China, 48 years old, never heard of it).

This illustrates the filtering effect of interest preferences on dissemination reach. This type of result is not directly related to dissemination motivation or emotional resonance, but is an inevitable phenomenon in cross-regional dissemination.

The stratification of identification strength and dissemination results show a clear correlation. Superficial liking (e.g., simply finding the melody catchy) corresponds to the “only heard” state (40 %). This group hasn’t developed a deep emotional connection and is merely passively exposed to the song. Moderate resonance (e.g., some lyrics resonate with personal experiences) corresponds to the “heard and shared” state (32 %). This group expresses their emotions through sharing but doesn’t participate in topic discussions or secondary creations. Deep empathy (e.g., shared values) corresponds to the “participation in topic discussions/secondary creations” state (8 %). This group becomes the “core node” of dissemination, actively driving the song’s spread.

The willingness to spread the song further reflects the reverse feedback of the result on the dissemination motivation: the secondary creations and topic-driven behavior of the deeply empathetic group generate new dissemination content, which is recommended to a wider audience by the algorithm.

"I made a suona version and posted it on Douyin. I didn't expect so many people to like it, and many commented that they were 'healed'" (Mainland China, 28 years old, participated in topic discussions).

This cycle of result feedback and motivation reinforcement further amplifies the cross-regional dissemination effect, creating sustained popularity.

CONCLUSIONS

This study takes the cross-regional dissemination of the song Méi chūxī as an example. Using grounded theory, through in-depth interviews with 25 respondents from both sides of the Taiwan Strait and analysis of online dissemination texts, it constructs a dynamic interaction model of cross-regional dissemination and emotional identification among people on both sides of the Strait. The main conclusions are as follows: The core of dissemination dynamics lies in the synergistic effect of traffic fragmentation and dissemination motivation. Algorithm recommendation and social circle diffusion constitute two paths of traffic fragmentation, respectively dominating the initial dissemination in mainland China and Taiwan. Dissemination motivation is divided into traffic following and emotional expression; the former drives superficial dissemination, while the latter promotes deep dissemination, and secondary creation acts as an important amplifier of traffic fragmentation. Emotional resonance is a key mediating factor facilitating the transition from contact to identification and then to dissemination. The shared emotions of ordinary people's struggle and acceptance in the lyrics break down regional barriers, forming the basis for cross-group resonance. The appeal of the melody lowers the threshold for emotional understanding, while the alignment of perceived values promotes the sublimation of resonance. These three factors work together to transform passive contact into active identification. In this process, regional background plays a moderating role in path differentiation and interpretation differences. The differences in social media ecosystems between the two regions have led to divergent dissemination paths: mainland China exhibits rapid algorithmic fragmentation, while Taiwan tends towards slower, cyclical dissemination. Differences in life background and cultural perception further shape the direction of emotional interpretation: mainland Chinese audiences focus more on narratives of struggle, while Taiwanese audiences are more inclined towards narratives of healing; however, these differences have not weakened the core resonance.

In summary, the dynamic interaction mechanism between cross-regional dissemination and emotional identification presents a complete closed loop of triggering, regulation, resonance, and feedback. Dissemination dynamics trigger initial contact, regional background adjusts the dissemination path and interpretive direction, emotional resonance achieves a shift in identification, and the dissemination result, through secondary dissemination, reinforces motivation, ultimately forming a complete cross-regional dissemination chain.

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